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ABSTRACT

Recommendations for national child care policy are offered. It is recommended that the Federal Government, in partnership with the states, expand subsidies to support low-income families' use of high quality child care programs and arrangements. In partnership with the states, the Federal Government should expand Head Start and other compensatory preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds at risk of early school failure. Governments at all levels, and employers and other private-sector groups, should make investments to strengthen the infrastructure of the child care system. To this end, it is recommended that: (1) resource and referral services be expanded; (2) caregiver training and wages be improved; (3) vendor-voucher programs be expanded; (4) the organization of family day care organizations be encouraged; and (5) planning and coordination be improved. It is also recommended that the Federal Government initiate a process to develop national standards for child care and mandate unpaid leave for employed parents of infants up to 1 year of age. Concluding arguments assert that children must head the list of national priorities. (RH)

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PRESENTATION TO THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS ON THE REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL ENTITLED " WHO CARES FOR AMERICA'S CHILDREN? CHILD CARE POLICY FOR THE 1990'S", APRIL 5, 1990 BY JUNE SOLNIT SALE, DIRECTOR, UCLA CHILD CARE SERVICES

I am June Solnit Sale, Director of UCLA Child Care Services and am pleased to report the recommendations of the just released two year study of the Committee on Child Development Research and Public Policy, Panel on Child Care Policy of the National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council, of which I was a member. This report entitled "Who Cares for America's Children? Child Care Policy for the 1990's" is the result of diligent work by a panel of 19 members, representing diverse groups: business and unions; academics from child development, sociology, psychology, psychiatry, anthropology, political science and education; hands-on practitioners including state and local government officials, a pediatrician, a Head Start administrator and a child care center administrator. We reviewed existing data and research and were given information concerning other industrialized countries by experts from those nations; we talked with parents and providers; we carefully listened to supply-side economists, to state regulators as well as to church officials and we debated all of the child care issues of concern today, including cost, quality, affordability and availability, as well as sponsorship and who should be served. Despite our varied backgrounds, orientations, values and points of view, the panel was unanimous in the conviction that " we are currently investing too little in the care of our children for the future health of our nation as a whole." Our panel believes that a minimum of five to ten billion additional dollars annually must be invested by local , state and federal governments to develop a coherent, workable child care system that preserves parental choice and assures some level of quality for all children. Currently, approximately $16 billion is spent annually for child care in the United States by parents, governments and private entities. But the evidence was overwhelming that this additional investment in the health and well being of our children is the most prudent and economical way of insuring the future productivity of the American work force.

After extensive reading, research, testimony and drawing upon our own experience, the Panel assessed the findings and reached the following conclusions:

We found that child care in the United States is like a patchwork quilt that has been held together without a common thread. The pieces of the quilt are diverse and that is often viewed as both its strength and weakness. There are a few exquisite bright pieces, others are dull, ordinary

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pieces and still others are ragged and torn. There is a need for a comprehensive child care quilt, held together by strong support from government, community institutions and private enterprise, that will provide cover for the needs of our country's children and their families.

On the basis of our review and assessment of the monetary and human costs, effects and feasibility of selected alternative policy and programmatic actions our panel made five major recommendations, which I will briefly outline and discuss:

1) " THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE STATES, SHOULD EXPAND SUBSIDIES TO SUPPORT LOW-INCOME FAMILIES' USE OF QUALITY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS AND ARRANGEMENTS."

The panel found that good quality child care, which may be found under a variety of auspices and arrangements, does enhance growth and development, as well as promote good emotional and physical health of children. Quality in this context means that their are high staff/child ratios, that programs meet the individual needs of the children, that the staff is stable and educated in early childhood education and that parents are involved in the program located in a safe and healthy environment.

The child care system or non-system that presently exists is inadequate, it doesn't work for far too many children and parents, especially those from low income families. Children in poor quality care are at risk, not only for developmental delays and possible later school failure, but also for significant health problems that will be costly for us as a nation to remedy and treat in the future. Quality child care is an essential component in establishing a program of prevention for at risk children, as well as helping poor families achieve economic self-sufficiency through employment. Good child care is an empty promise if we do not supply the financial support necessary to develop the resources to maintain a quality child care system.

2) "IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE STATES, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD EXPAND HEAD START AND OTHER COMPENSATORY PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS FOR INCOME-ELIGIBLE 3-AND 4-YEAR-OLDS WHO ARE AT RISK OF EARLY SCHOOL FAILURE."
I was involved with the first Los Angeles County summer Head Start program in 1965. Those were the days of the Watts turbulence and many were cynical about what a preschool program could do in the chaotic inner cities. Twenty five years later, after many major evaluation studies have provided convincing evidence of the effectiveness of high-quality comprehensive early childhood education programs, less than 20% of eligible four year old children in the United States participate in Head Start. "Accordingly, the panel concludes that the Head Start

program should be expanded to serve all income-eligible 3- and 4-year olds in need of comprehensive child development services. In addition, Head Start programs should be integrated with community child care programs to provide extended-day care for children whose parents are employed."

3) "GOVERNMENTS AT ALL LEVELS, ALONG WITH EMPLOYERS AND OTHER PRIVATE-SECTOR GROUPS, SHOULD MAKE INVESTMENTS TO STRENGTHEN THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE CHILD CARE SYSTEM."

Several steps are recommended toward this end:

" A) EXPAND RESOURCE AND REFERRAL SERVICES;

B) IMPROVE CAREGIVER TRAINING AND WAGES;

C) EXPAND VENDOR-VOUCHER PROGRAMS;

D) ENCOURAGE THE ORGANIZATION OF FAMILY DAY CARE ORGANIZATIONS; AND

E) IMPROVE PLANNING AND COORDINATION."

The panel found no matter what their socio-economic status, a majority of American families (over 56%) use and need child care. According to current demographic predictions, by the year 2000, approximately 80% of school-age children and 70% of preschoolers with mothers who are in the workforce outside the home will be in some form of care.

Today many child care needs are not being met by the patchwork services now in place. Ask any working parent with young children. Parents who have an infant or toddler, a school-age child, a disabled youngster or mildly or chronically ill children will undoubtedly have difficulty in making adequate, stable and affordable child care arrangements. And low income families are doubly disadvantaged because they often don't have the time, money or support in finding adequate care. Improved planning and coordination is vital to the delivery of needed services. The Los Angeles Board of Supervisors should be commended for the work they have done in this area. We know it is just a beginning...but what an important one it is!

Parental choice is an essential part of the American child care system. There was little disagreement concerning that value. But choice is meaningless if there is no assurance of quality, accessibility and affordability. The recently completed Child Care Employee Project Staffing study found that families with children most at risk were often in the lowest quality child care centers. Resource and referral services that have been pioneered in California are one way of assisting parents in finding appropriate child care and assisting families with choices.

Again, because the issue of quality has such a potent outcome for the future development of children, the panel was concerned about the high staff turn-over child care is experiencing. One of the major indicators of quality is staff stability and yet approximately 40% of the nation's day care workers leave their jobs each year, in large part due to low wages and poor benefits. Improved caregiver wages and benefits would lead to greater stability and the incentive for more and better education and training. Too long caregivers have subsidized child care by accepting low pay. We learned that other industrialized countries have been successful in raising the status of child care workers through increased pay and educational opportunities. The United States could learn from this experience.

California has led the country in adopting what we call alternative payment programs. These are essentially vendor-voucher programs which support the ideas of parental choice for income-eligible families. No doubt, California will be asked to share its expertise with other states in the development of this kind of delivery system.

Family day care is a wonderful way of providing care for children in small, intimate home settings when it is well done. As a form of care it is largely invisible and unregulated. However, the work and hours are hard and long. The turnover rate is high due to isolation, low wages and lack of value placed on it by the community. The panel concluded that the expansion of family day care organizations and systems would be an important support for family day care providers and would help to regulate homes now without any form of support.

4) "THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD INITIATE A PROCESS TO DEVELOP NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR CHILD CARE."
We found that regulations for child care programs in the United States vary enormously because there are no national standards and the sole authority to regulate lies with the states. Our panel was concerned that children living across the border of a given state might receive quite different care since each state's regulations and standards may be dramatically different. For example in California our State Department of Social Services' regulations mandate that for preschoolers there must be one adult for every 12 children; Arizona regulations mandate one adult for every 25 children and in Nevada there are no regulations.

Our report says, "An extensive and growing body of scientific research and best professional practice has established the importance of child care quality for child development. Based on existing knowledge, it is possible to specify reasonable ranges for standards to govern many important features of child care, including staff/child ratios, group size, caregiver qualifications and the

configuration of physical space. Current state regulations vary dramatically, and few reflect existing knowledge about the dimensions of quality that are essential to protect children's health and safety and to stimulate social and cognitive development."

5) "THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SHOULD MANDATE UNPAID, JOB-PROTECTED LEAVE FOR EMPLOYED PARENTS OF INFANTS UP TO ONE YEAR OF AGE."
This is probably the most controversial of the panel's recommendations. It has generated the most heat, judging from the response of the media. The Wall Street Journal quoted an official of the National Association of Manufacturers as saying, "You could take the leave and go to Hawaii. This kind of bill doesn't guarantee good parents." (The Wall Street Journal, March 15, 1990). Obviously, this spokeswoman is not a parent or has forgotten what it is like to care for a baby.

The shortage of quality infant and toddler care in this country is a shocking fact of life. And when a family is able to find it, it is costly due to the need for a high caregiver/infant ratio. Ask any working parent about the wrenching experience they face in attempting to find a safe, comfortable arrangement for their infant when they must return to work or lose their job or status at work. It is interesting to note that almost every other industrialized nation has instituted some form of parental leave. I have just finished reading a report on child care in France in which employers were interviewed about parental leave policies. Unlike the response in the Wall Street Journal there was little complaint and a good deal of support for parental leave programs.

To conclude this presentation, I want you all to know that I am not unaware of what some are saying about the panel's report. To quote another leader of the business community, who said "The report was put together by a bunch of academics and/or scientists who never had to work a day in the real world. They never had to meet a payroll or find someone to fill in for someone." As a child care administrator in the real world who is struggling to meet a payroll and is having a difficult time operating a quality program with limited funds; as one who sees what difference a child care subsidy can make for low income families; as one who knows first hand what parents suffer when they must place their two month old child in the hands of a stranger; as one who must pay taxes to support the failing savings and loan industry; as one who reads about billions in overruns in the defense industry, I can tell you that this report is real and important and vital to the future of our country. We must establish priorities and our children must head that list.

I have been asked "what can be expected of this report?" By itself, nothing can be expected since it is simply words and pages bound together. But with the help of children's advocates and policy makers, I believe that we can make a difference in the lives of children, our future citizens. The choice is ours. Our future depends on it.